

*International Education: Letters and Notes from Jail:  
Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

This lesson is constructed to take two to four days depending on the number of activities chosen and the length of class periods.
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**I. Content:**

I want my students to understand (or be able to):

- A. The use of Rogerian argumentation by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”.
- B. The use of civil disobedience to fight oppression as a tradition among religious leaders, especially King and Bonhoeffer.

**II. Prerequisites:**

In order to fully appreciate this lesson, the student must know (or be experienced in):

- A. Background of the American notion of civil disobedience as put forth by Henry David Thoreau (see State Course Outline for English III).
- B. The differences between classical and Rogerian argumentation (see state course-of-study for English III).
- C. Background on Martin Luther King’s involvement with the Civil Rights Movement in post World War II America (see state course-of-study for English III).
- D. Background of the Nazi Party oppression of civil liberties in the years leading up to and during World War II (general knowledge).

**III. Instructional Objective:**

The student will:

- A. Expand his knowledge of the human condition and experience.
- B. Read and analyze literature that reflects the integration and disintegration of postwar society.
- C. Demonstrate appreciation of the writer’s craft.
- D. Read to become an involved or informed citizen.
- E. Compare the ideas of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr.

**IV. Materials and Equipment**

*Teacher: one copy per student*

- 1. “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr. (available on the internet at many sites. Search prompt M.L. King: Birmingham Jail.
- 2. Questions for use as reading guide and or discussion: **(Teacher Handout #1)**
- 3. A brief Dietrich Bonhoeffer biography and time line: **(Teacher Handout #2)**
- 4. Selected samples of notes written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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while in prison: (Teacher Handout #3)

**Student:**

1. “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr.  
One copy per student.
2. Questions for use as reading guide and or discussion:  
(Teacher Handout #1)
3. A brief Dietrich Bonhoeffer biography and time line:  
(Teacher Handout #2)
4. Selected samples of notes by Dietrich Bonhoeffer written  
while he was in prison: (Teacher Handout #3)

**V. Instructional Procedure:**

**Day One:**

1. The teacher will through lecture and class discussion set the time frame for the writing of King’s letter and review with the class the basic goals of the civil rights movement, Thoreau’s notions of civil disobedience, and Martin Luther King’s role as leader of nonviolent demonstrations to initiate change in our country. (English III course-of-study).
2. The teacher will distribute copies of the “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” any selected reading guide questions, and assign the reading as homework.

**Day Two:**

1. Ask students for general responses to King’s letter and its place as an important statement of American ideals or as an important part of American literature.
2. Review the selected reading guide questions and correct any misconceptions or misunderstandings.
3. Ask students if they have any questions for clarification or discussion.
4. Review Rogerian argumentation and with the students establish how Martin Luther King used it. Use reading guide questions as an aid.
5. Distribute the Dietrich Bonhoeffer bios to the class and either go over it together or have the students read individually.
6. Discuss Bonhoeffer’s role as a religious leader who used civil disobedience to try to initiate change and protect civil liberties.
7. Distribute the Bonhoeffer notes from prison.
8. Divide the class into groups of four and do one of the following:
  - A. Have each group locate and cite parallels between Bonhoeffer’s notes and King’s letter and be prepared to share their findings with the class.

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- B. Assign each group a particular section of Bonhoeffer's notes and have them locate and cite parallels between Bonhoeffer's notes and King's letter, and prepare a brief presentation of their findings for the class.
- 9. Listen to presentations and/or discuss the students' findings.
- 10. Tell the class that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was convicted and executed for his apparent approval of or participation in the planning of a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.
- 11. Put this statement by Martin Luther King on the board and let the students react to it.

"If your opponent has a conscience, then follow Gandhi and non-violence. But if your enemy has no conscience like Hitler, then follow Bonhoeffer."

- 12. Assign as homework an essay in which the students either defend or attack King's statement.

**VI. Assessment/Evaluation:**

- A. Essays: see Day Two
- B. Questions covering King's speech on unit exam.

**VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:**

Standard 1: Reading Process

**Goal 1.2: Acquire Concepts About Text**

- 11.LA.1.2.1 Identify the features and the rhetorical devices of a variety of literature and informational documents.

Standard 2: Comprehension/Interpretation

**Goal 2.1: Acquire Strategies and Skill for Comprehending Text**

- 11.LA.2.1.1 Compare and contrast similar themes or topics by authors from different time periods or cultures to explain how the historical or cultural context shapes each author's point of view.
- 11.LA.2.1.2 Apply reading strategies to self monitor for comprehension.

**Goal 2.2: Acquire Skills to Comprehend Expository Text**

- 11.LA.2.2.2 Define the purpose and audience of a variety of communication formats (e.g., essays, letters, user manuals, lab reports, websites).

Standard 3: Writing Process

**Goal 3.1: Acquire Prewriting Skills**

- 11.LA.3.1.5 Produce a piece of writing within a set period of time

Standard 4: Writing Applications

**Goal 4.3: Acquire Persuasive Writing Skills**

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11.LA.4.3.1 Write persuasive compositions that acknowledge and refute opposing arguments.

**VIII. Follow Up Activities:**

- A. Have students search the Internet for more about the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
- B. Have students research MLK's response to the Black Panthers, Black Muslims, or other groups that did not embrace nonviolence. Use the Internet and search for the MLK papers project.
- C. Hold a discussion in which students try to determine at what point or through what set of circumstances King would have determined that his opponents were no longer of good conscience and therefore would have embraced violence.
- D. Have students research other religious leaders who have led movements to force social or political change. Search prompt: religious dissidents.
- E. Have students discuss the role that religious leaders play in today's society.

## Teacher Handout 1

### POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR READING GUIDE AND DISCUSSION

1. King's public "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (April 16, 1963) is written in opposition to a specific opinion piece signed by eight clergymen and published in the Birmingham News. At the letter's beginning, what is King's bearing or attitude toward these clergymen who have called him an impatient outsider and troublemaker? What image of his critics does he create early in the argument? In what relation to them does he place himself?
2. How does King dismantle the argument the clergymen and others have made about "outside agitation?" What four steps does King say are necessary in every nonviolent campaign? How does he say that his followers and allies have carried out these steps in seeking to achieve racial justice in Birmingham? According to King, what is the immediate purpose of direct, nonviolent action? Why does he believe that the peaceful protests he has been organizing throughout the South do not amount to merely passive behavior, but instead rise to the level of dramatic action?
3. What seems to be the proper relation between the individual and the community, and between the local community and society in the broader sense? Track as many of the letter's references as you can to the great personages and events of history. Why are there so many of them, and why does King also weave in so many references to the ordinary person--as in the passage beginning "We know from painful experience . . ." as well? Find some instances in which he classifies individuals and groups, whether for better or for worse. Why does he keep doing that?
4. Explain what King means by his phrase, "the myth of time." What version of history does he offer in its place? What is the vehicle of historical change and progress?
5. King's letter is a rebuttal to a public statement by Alabama clergymen critical of organized protest in the city of Birmingham. Point by point, list the clergymen's criticisms and briefly summarize King's rebuttals.
6. Describe the four-step process King's campaign of "nonviolent direct action" follows and explain its connection to the situation in Birmingham. How does laying out this process strengthen King's rebuttal?
7. King pays careful attention to the word choices the clergymen make in their statement (for example, the words *untimely* and *extreme*). He also chooses his own terms and labels very carefully. Identify and discuss the significance of some of these terms.
8. Elaborate on King's distinction between just and unjust laws. Why is it necessary for King to make this distinction?

## Teacher Handout 1

9. Throughout his argument King asserts moral principles and historical lessons that he strongly implies the clergy have forgotten or are simply ignoring. Quote or paraphrase some of these. (For example: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”)
10. Besides appealing to universal principles, King appeals to emotions with vivid illustrations, examples, and analogies. Which ones strike you as especially moving or convincing?
11. Halfway through his argument, King says he will make “two honest confessions,” but those “confessions” turn out to be counterattacks on his critics. Summarize his criticisms of “white moderates” and the “white Church.”
12. King also subtly threatens his critics, warning them that they would be wise to deal with him rather than face the alternative. What alternative does he refer to?
13. Although King is passionate in his rebuttal of the clergymen, he presents himself and addresses them in such a way as to avoid alienating them. Identify some of the ways he does this.
14. What can you say about the audience for King’s letter and King’s purpose in writing it? Is he just trying to get those eight clergymen to change their minds, or does he have a broader purpose and audience? Explain.

## Teacher Handout 2

Brief Bio of Dietrich Bonhoeffer taken from [www.pbs.org/opb/bonhoeffer](http://www.pbs.org/opb/bonhoeffer)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German university professor with a doctorate in theology, a Lutheran pastor, a participant in the early ecumenical movement, a prolific writer, and a central figure in the Protestant church struggle against Nazism. His participation in the plots to assassinate Adolf Hitler led to his arrest, imprisonment, and eventual death by hanging at Flossenburg concentration camp in 1945, at the age of 39.

Only after the war, as his work was disseminated around the world by Bonhoeffer's friend and biographer Eberhard Bethge, did the fresh pertinence of his ideas become clear. Though forged in the crucible of his struggle against Nazism, Bonhoeffer's striking notions of "religionless Christianity," costly grace, and direct religious engagement with political forces -- along with his own martyrdom -- have spoken directly to the situations of contemporary Christians.

### CONSPIRATOR (1933-1943)

Frustrated with Germany and his fellow pastors, Bonhoeffer accepted a position as parish minister in London. He served for eighteen months as pastor to two German congregations in Sydenham and the East End of London.

During his stay in London, the Nazis increased their pressure on the church. In 1933, the German Christians staged a massive rally at the Berlin Sports Palace. Speakers, including Nazi party leaders, called for the removal of the Old Testament because of its connection with the Jewish religion. More church leaders were succumbing to the Nazis.

In response, Bonhoeffer increased his anti-Nazi activities, using his sermons to speak against the Nazis and assisting Jews and other German refugees arriving in England. His activities brought him in contact with a wider circle of religious leaders, including Rev. George Bell. Before returning to Germany, Bonhoeffer planned to travel to India and meet Gandhi. He asked George Bell, who knew Gandhi personally, to write an introduction for him. But Bonhoeffer's plans would change. In 1934, the Confessing Church established new seminaries in Germany. Bonhoeffer was invited to return to Germany in 1935 to direct one at Zingst. He accepted the position and took his new responsibility very seriously and prepared himself by visiting church communes in England and consulting with several church leaders.

Twenty-three candidates began studies at Zingst, but the seminary had to move to a more permanent location in Finkenwalde only a few weeks later. He spent much of his time looking for money, furnishings, and supplies for the seminary. He also lectured, held discussions with the students, and began writing his book *The Cost of Discipleship*.

The Gestapo stepped up their pressure on pastors and ministers who failed to vow loyalty to the Fuhrer. They eventually uncovered all of the secret Confessing Church seminaries and closed them all down. All the young men studying at the seminaries were given the

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choice of enlisting or being sent to prison. Many of Bonhoeffer's students chose to enlist, but some were arrested.

After his seminary was closed, Bonhoeffer was now available for military service. His brother-in-law, Dohnanyi, suggested an alternative course. Dohnanyi was working for the Abwehr, Military Intelligence, but was secretly working with his supervisors in the resistance. The conspiracy was working from inside the government against Hitler. They needed a messenger to contact the Allies, and Bonhoeffer seemed to have the right connections.

Under the guise of an agent for the Abwehr, Bonhoeffer began traveling outside of Germany. He met with his old contacts in the ecumenical movement, including Bishop George Bell, and asked them for assistance. He had a difficult time rationalizing his job as a spy while he was a man of God, but he decided that "it is better to do evil than to be evil."

Bonhoeffer also helped the Abwehr to send German Jews out of the country under the cover of "Operation 7." After an earlier botched mission sending German agents into the United States, Hitler suggested to Canaris that he use German Jews instead - so Canaris obliged him. The Jewish "agents" were sent outside of Germany and given no orders beyond escaping. While he was in Germany, Bonhoeffer often visited the estate of Ruth von Kleist-Retzow, an elderly friend and benefactor. Ruth's granddaughter, Maria von Wedemeyer, was also a frequent visitor at Ruth's home. Dietrich grew to admire the young woman and remarked to Eberhard Bethge about his feelings. In January, Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeyer became engaged, but only after agreeing to the request of Maria's mother to wait several months before marrying.

### PRISONER (1943-1945)

In 1943, the Gestapo increased their investigation of the Abwehr, particularly into allegations of suspicious expenditures during "Operation 7." Both Bonhoeffer and his brother-in-law Dohnanyi were named in the investigation, but Admiral Canaris assured them that the Gestapo would probably do nothing. However, on April 5th both Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer were arrested by Manfred Roeder and the Gestapo. They were interrogated regarding the activities of Abwehr, but it became clear that the Gestapo hadn't suspected the worst.

While imprisoned at Tegel, Bonhoeffer gained the trust of other prisoners and some of the prison guards. Because of his profession and his family's connections, Bonhoeffer enjoyed many privileges denied the average prisoner. Roeder also made sure that Bonhoeffer was as comfortable as possible and supplied him with clean blankets and allowed limited contact with his family.

Inside his cell, he continued to write and send letters to friends and family. A few guards passed letters in and out of the prison, but friends sent the most secret information in

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coded messages. Many of the letters to his parents and Maria showed his confidence that the investigation would eventually end and he would be released.

Bonhoeffer played down his involvement in Abwehr activities and used his perceived ignorance to his advantage. Roeder questioned him on 'Operation 7', his exemption from service in the military, and his trips abroad. Roeder attempted to trick him during his questioning and also used Maria to weaken him, but Bonhoeffer always claimed ignorance of any wrongdoing.

Conditions for Dohnanyi were much worse. While Roeder released Christel von Dohnanyi (Dietrich's sister), he insisted that Hans suffer as much as possible in prison. Dohnanyi eventually became very ill and suffered during most of his imprisonment, spending much of the time in a hospital bed. In June 1944, Dohnanyi's health worsened with a case of scarlet fever. He practiced his symptoms to use them as a stalling tactic.

Friends on the outside continued to assist the prisoners' case, and eventually Roeder was removed from the case in early 1944. His replacement, Kutzner, continued the investigation but he didn't appear to have the same political motivations of his predecessor, Roeder. Everyone hoped for the best, but things changed after von Stauffenberg's failed assassination attempt.

### The Gestapo Takes Over

On July 20, 1944 von Stauffenberg planted two bombs set with clocks inside Hitler's meeting room at his Wolf's Lair. However, the scheduled staff meeting was shorter than expected, and Hitler was not in the room when the bombs exploded. Hitler was enraged and the Gestapo escalated their hunt for conspirators. A connection to the Abwehr was discovered and Oster, Canaris, and others were arrested in the days that followed.

Hope was fading for Bonhoeffer and the other prisoners, but he continued to write and help the other prisoners. He served as a medic during air raids, and was consulted by the prison commandant regarding drills and safety. Both the prisoners and the guards found Bonhoeffer friendly and reassuring. One guard in particular, Corporal Knobloch, became a trusted connection with the outside world. For over a year, Knobloch passed messages and packages in and out of prison, and arranged secret meetings for Bonhoeffer.

On October 5th, a Gestapo lawyer and investigator, Walter Huppenkothen, entered Dohnanyi's cell and tossed onto his bed copies of documents from the dossier Dohnanyi hid in Zossen - the documents he had collected as evidence of Nazi crimes.

When Dietrich heard of the discovery of the Zossen documents, he finally considered escape. Knobloch arranged escape plans with Bonhoeffer's family and set a date for the two of them to walk out of Tegel and "disappear." However, as the Gestapo continued their investigation, more arrests were made, including Bonhoeffer's brother Klaus and his brother-in-law Rudiger Schleicher. Fearing that his escape would endanger his family and friends, Dietrich canceled the plans.

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Dietrich was moved to a cell at the Central Security Office in Berlin. Klaus, Rudiger, and Eberhard Bethge were kept in another Gestapo prison nearby. Communication with the outside was more difficult and less frequent, but many of the coconspirators were moved to the Central Security Office, including Oster and Canaris, and kept in cells in the same wing with Bonhoeffer. Just before Bonhoeffer was moved again, Dohnanyi was also moved to the Central Security Office and the two brothers-in-law were able to see each other briefly.

Huppenkothen and other Gestapo investigators used torture and claims that other prisoners had confessed their crimes. At first Dohnanyi believed the Gestapo's investigation still had no inkling of the most dangerous activities of the conspiracy, but he began to suspect somebody had confessed.

In February, Klaus and Rudiger received sentences of death. Rudiger's brother, Dr. Rolf Scheicher, went to the People's Court to request mercy for his brother but found the building severely damaged by an Allied air raid. He was asked to administer to a wounded officer, and was surprised to find the already dead officer to be the same judge who had sentenced his brother to death the day before. He refused to sign the death certificate until he was allowed to talk to the Minister of Justice. He succeeded in receiving a delay of the executions.

Because of the increased threat of air raids on the Central Security Office, Dietrich and several other prisoners were moved to Buchenwald. Among the prisoners was Payne Best, a British agent who was captured by the Nazis in 1939 during the famous Venlo Incident. Best had no knowledge of Bonhoeffer before they met, but he found him a very friendly man and was impressed with Bonhoeffer's attitude and courage.

At Buchenwald, Bonhoeffer was kept with several other prisoners, including Kokorin, a Russian air force officer, Dr. Rascher, the infamous German doctor who experimented with prisoners at Dachau concentration camp, and Hugh Falconer, an English officer. Considering the situation, the conditions were relatively pleasant and the prisoners could tell that the war was nearing an end.

On April 5th, Hitler ordered that Dohnanyi and Bonhoeffer not survive the war. Huppenkothen was sent to stage quick trials and find them both guilty of conspiracy against the Fuhrer. The next day, Huppenkothen arrived in Sachsenhausen and quickly condemned Dohnanyi to death. The next day, a Saturday, he traveled to Flossenbug to continue with the other conspirators.

However, Bonhoeffer was not at Flossenbug as planned. Earlier in the week, several prisoners, including Bonhoeffer, Payne Best, Kokorin, Falcon, Rascher, Muller, Liedig, and Gehre were transported in a wood-burning truck from Buchenwald. At the turnoff toward Flossenbug, the truck was stopped and Muller and Liedig were ordered to get off. Gehre jumped off with the other two prisoners. Apparently, Bonhoeffer was supposed to be the third prisoner destined for Flossenbug, but Gehre wanted to stay with Muller.

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On Sunday, Bonhoeffer gave a morning service to celebrate the Sunday after Easter for the small group of prisoners. At first he was hesitant to preach in front of Catholics and Kokorin, an atheist, but Kokorin convinced him to speak. Immediately after the service, Bonhoeffer was ordered to return to Flossenbug. As he was leaving, he asked Best to tell Bishop Bell "This is the end - for me the beginning of life."

At Flossenbug, Bonhoeffer, Oster, Canaris, and other prisoners were quickly found guilty and condemned to die. In the early morning of April 9th, they were ordered to strip and were hanged from the gallows. The first attempt to hang Admiral Canaris failed and he had to be hanged a second time. The bodies were buried in a mass grave.

Two weeks later, on April 22nd, the S.S. collected Klaus Bonhoeffer, Rudiger Schleicher and others together for transport. The prisoners were told they were going to be released. On the way, the S.S. opened fire and killed all but one, H. Kosney, who managed to escape. Kosney eventually met Bonhoeffer's parents and told them the terrible news.

### Teacher Handout 3

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Notes from Prison taken from Dietrich Bonhoeffer Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. by Eberhard Bethge, Macmillan Company, New York, 1971

#### *Who stands fast?*

The great masquerade of evil has played havoc with all our ethical concepts. For evil to appear disguised as light, charity, historical necessity, or social justice is quite bewildering to anyone brought up on our traditional ethical concepts, while for the Christian who bases his life on the Bible it merely confirms the fundamental wickedness of evil.

The 'reasonable' people's failure is obvious. With the best intentions and a naive lack of realism, they think that with a little reason they can bend back into position the framework that has got out of joint. In their lack of vision they want to do justice to all sides, and so the conflicting forces wear them down with nothing achieved. Disappointed by the world's unreasonableness, they see themselves condemned to ineffectiveness; they step aside in resignation or collapse before the stronger party.

Still more pathetic is the total collapse of moral fanaticism. The fanatic thinks that his single-minded principles qualify him to do battle with the powers of evil; but like a bull he rushes at the red cloak instead of the person who is holding it; he exhausts himself and is beaten. He gets entangled in non-essentials and falls into the trap set by cleverer people.

Then there is the man with a *conscience*, who fights single-handed against heavy odds in situations that call for a decision. But the scale of the conflicts in which he has to choose - with no advice or support except from his own conscience - tears him to pieces. Evil approaches him in so many respectable and seductive disguises that his conscience becomes nervous and vacillating, till at last he contents himself with a salved instead of a clear conscience, so that he lies to his own conscience in order to avoid despair; for a man whose only support is his conscience can never realize that a bad conscience may be stronger and more wholesome than a deluded one.

From the perplexingly large number of possible decisions, the way of *duty* seems to be the sure way out. Here, what is commanded is accepted as what is most certain, and the responsibility for it rests on the commander, not on the person commanded. But no one who confines himself to the limits of duty ever goes so far as to venture, on his sole responsibility, to act in the only way that makes it possible to score a direct hit on evil and defeat it. The man of duty will in the end have to do his duty by the devil too.

As to the man who asserts his complete *freedom* to stand four square to the world, who values the necessary deed more highly than an unspoiled conscience or reputation, who is ready to sacrifice a barren principle for a fruitful compromise, or the barren wisdom of a middle course for a fruitful radicalism - let him beware lest his freedom should bring him down. He will assent to what is bad so as to ward off something worse, and in doing so he will no longer be able to realize that the worse, which he wants to avoid, might be the better. Here we have the raw material of tragedy.

Here and there people flee from public altercation into the sanctuary of private *virtuousness*. But anyone who does this must shut his mouth and his eyes to the injustice around him. Only at the cost of self-deception can he keep himself pure from the contamination arising from responsible action. In spite of all that he does, what he leaves undone will rob him of his peace of mind. He will either go to pieces because of this disquiet, or become the most hypocritical of Pharisees.

Who stands fast? Only the man whose final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God - the responsible man, who tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God. Where are these responsible people?

### Teacher Handout 3

#### *Contempt for humanity?*

There is a very real danger of our drifting into an attitude of contempt for humanity. We know quite well that we have no right to do so, and that it would lead us into the most sterile relation to our fellow-men. The following thoughts may keep us from such a temptation. It means that we at once fall into the worst blunders of our opponents. The man who despises another will never be able to make anything of him. Nothing that we despise in the other man is entirely absent from ourselves. We often expect from others more than we are willing to do ourselves. Why have we hitherto thought so intemperately about man and his frailty and temptability? We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer. The only profitable relationship to others -and especially to our weaker brethren - is one of love, and that means the will to hold fellowship with them. God himself did not despise humanity, but became man for men's sake.

#### *The sense of quality*

Unless we have the courage to fight for a revival of wholesome reserve between man and man, we shall perish in an anarchy of human values. The impudent contempt for such reserve is the mark of the rabble, just as inward uncertainty, haggling and cringing for the favour of insolent people, and lowering oneself to the level of the rabble are the way of becoming no better than the rabble oneself. When we forget what is due to ourselves and to others, when the feeling for human quality and the power to exercise reserve cease to exist, chaos is at the door. When we tolerate impudence for the sake of material comforts, then we abandon our self-respect, the floodgates are opened, chaos bursts the dam that we were to defend; and we are responsible for it all. In other times it may have been the business of Christianity to champion the equality of all men; its business today will be to defend passionately human dignity and reserve. The misinterpretation that we are acting for our own interests, and the cheap insinuation that our attitude is anti-social, we shall simply have to put up with; they are the invariable protests of the rabble against decency and "order". Anyone who is pliant and uncertain in this matter does not realize what is at stake, and indeed in his case the reproaches may well be justified. We are witnessing the leveling down of all ranks of society, and at the same time the birth of a new sense of nobility, which is binding together a circle of men from all former social classes. Nobility arises from and exists by sacrifice, courage, and a clear sense of duty to oneself and society, by expecting due regard for itself as a matter of course; and it shows an equally natural regard for others, whether they are of higher or of lower degree. We need all along the line to recover the lost sense of quality and a social order based on quality. Quality is the greatest enemy of any kind of mass leveling. Socially it means the renunciation of all place-hunting, a break with the cult of the 'star', an open eye both upwards and downwards, especially in the choice of one's more intimate friends, and pleasure in private life as well as courage to enter public life. Culturally it means a return from the newspaper and the radio to the book, from feverish activity to unhurried leisure, from dispersion to concentration, from sensationalism to reflection, from virtuosity to art, from snobbery to modesty, from extravagance to moderation. Quantities are competitive, qualities are complementary.

### Teacher Handout 3

#### *The view from below<sup>2</sup>*

There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below. from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled -in short, from the perspective of those who suffer. The important thing is that neither bitterness nor envy should have gnawed at the heart during this time, that we should have come to look with new eyes at matters great and small, sorrow and joy, strength and weakness, that our perception of generosity, humanity, justice and mercy should have become clearer, freer, less corruptible. We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune. This perspective from below must not become the partisan possession of those who are eternally dissatisfied; rather, we must do justice to life in all its dimensions from a higher satisfaction, whose foundation is beyond any talk of 'from below' or 'from above'. This is the way in which we may affirm it.

#### *Civil courage?*

What *lies* behind the complaint about the dearth of civil courage? In recent years we have seen a great deal of bravery and self-sacrifice, but civil courage hardly anywhere, even among ourselves. To attribute this simply to personal cowardice would be too facile a psychology; its background is quite different. In a long history, we Germans have had to learn the need for and the strength of obedience. In the subordination of all personal wishes and ideas to the tasks to which we have been called, we have seen the meaning and the greatness of our lives. We have looked upwards, not in servile fear, but in free trust, seeing in our tasks a call, and in our call a vocation. This readiness to follow a command from 'above' rather than our own private opinions and wishes was a sign of legitimate self-distrust. Who would deny that in obedience, in their task and calling, the Germans have again and again shown the utmost bravery and self-sacrifice? But the German has kept his freedom -and what nation has talked more passionately of freedom than the Germans, from Luther to the idealist philosophers? - by seeking deliverance from self-will through service to the community. Calling and freedom were to him two sides of the same thing. But in this he misjudged the world; he did not realize that his submissiveness and self-sacrifice could be exploited for evil ends. When that happened, the exercise of the calling itself became questionable, and all the moral principles of the German were bound to totter. The fact could not be escaped that the German still lacked something fundamental: he could not see the need for free and responsible action, even in opposition to his task and his calling; in its place there appeared on the one hand an irresponsible lack of scruple, and on the other a self-tormenting punctiliousness that never led to action. civil courage, in fact, can grow only out of the free responsibility of free men. Only now are the Germans beginning to discover the meaning of free responsibility. It depends on a God who demands responsible action in a bold venture of faith, and who promises forgiveness and consolation to the man who becomes a sinner in that venture.